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Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 267921

NODIS
FOR DR BRZEZINSKI

FOL RPT AMMAN 8233 SENT ACTION SECSTATE DTD 08 NOV 77

QUOTE: S E C R E T AMMAN 8233

NODIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PGOV, JO, SY, XF
SUBJECT: ZAID RIFAI--ASAD VISIT

SUMMARY: ZAID RIFAI RECENTLY VISITED PRESIDENT ASAD AND TOLD ME ASAD'S REAL CONCERN IS NOT THE PRESENCE AT GENEVA OF THE PLO OR PROCEDURE; HIS PRIMARY CONCERN NOW IS THAT U.S. CANNOT DELIVER MIDEAST SOLUTION. HE WOULD LIKE U.S. TO COMMIT ITSELF TO FULL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL AND PALESTINIAN RIGHTS WHILE INDICATING SOMEHOW U.S. HAD ABILITY TO CARRY THROUGH WITH STATED OBJECTIVES. SYRIA DOES NOT WANT TO GO TO GENEVA IF IT WILL ONLY SERVE TO PROVIDE COVER FOR SADAT TO GET HIS SETTLEMENT, WHILE GOLAN AND WEST BANK REMAIN UNSOLVED. SYRIA RAISING PLO ISSUES AS ROADBLOCK
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TO GENEVA PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF THIS CONCERN. ASAD, ACCORDING RIFAI, NOT IN FAVOR OF PALESTINE MINI-STATE, ONLY TOTAL WITHDRAWAL AND PALESTINIAN RIGHTS. HE NOTED HE THINKS KHADDAM POOR REPORTER AND IT BETTER IF PRESIDENT CARTER COMMUNICATES DIRECTLY WITH ASAD. RIFAI STILL CONCERNED HUSSEIN HAS NO REAL POLICY EXCEPT TO GET EGYPT AND SYRIA TO GENEVA. RIFAI DID NOT PUSH IDEA OF HUSSEIN REASSERTING HIMSELF ON WEST BANK AS HE USUALLY DOES. HE DOES NOT BELIEVE HUSSEIN SHOULD GO TO GENEVA WITHOUT

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SYRIA. NEITHER SADAT NOR ASAD, HE NOTED, WANT A
FULL ARAB SUMMIT. END SUMMARY

1. I SAW EX-PRIME MINISTER RIFAI FOR THE FIRST TIME
IN SEVERAL WEEKS. WHILE MANY OF HIS REACTIONS TO ASAD
VISIT HAVE BEEN REPORTED ELSEWHERE AND NEED NOT BE
REPEATED, TALK SHARPENED SOMEWHAT HIS ASSESSMENT OF
ASAD'S POSITION. WE ALSO COVERED SOME INTERNAL ISSUES
AND SOUTH LEBANON (REPORTED SEPTEL).

2. RIFAI SAID THAT ASAD WAS NOT PARTICULARLY CONCERNED
ABOUT THE PLO OR PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS IF THE U.S. WOULD
DO TWO THINGS IN ESSENCE: (A) COMMIT ITSELF TO FULL
ISRAELI TERRITORIAL WITHDRAWAL AND PALESTINIAN RIGHTS,
AND (B) GIVE SOME INDICATION (UNSPECIFIC) THAT THE
U.S. WAS ABLE TO CARRY THROUGH ON MIDDLE EAST POLICY
WITH ITS STATED OBJECTIVES. IN THE COURSE OF OUR
CONVERSATIONS IT BECAME CLEAR THAT LATTER POINT MEANS
THAT ASAD INSISTED HE WAS CONFUSED OVER WHAT HE SAW
WAS CONSTANTLY SHIFTING FOCUS OF U.S. STATEMENTS ON
THE MIDDLE EAST. AS A RESULT, RIFAI SAID, THAT ASAD
PROFESSED TIME AND AGAIN THE CONCERN THAT THE U.S.
COULD NOT DELIVER THE SOLUTION ON THE MIDDLE EAST.
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3. RIFAI EXPLAINED ASAD'S VIEW BASICALLY AS BEING
THAT SYRIA WOULD NOT GO TO GENEVA ONLY TO COVER FOR
EGYPT. IF EGYPT WANTED AND COULD GET AN AGREEMENT
ON ITS OWN, THEN IT COULD DO SO, AND SYRIA WOULD SIT SILENT,
BUT SYRIA WOULD NOT JEOPARDIZE ITS CREDENTIALS AND NATIONALISM
BY HELPING. THUS SYRIA WANTED "GUARANTEES" THAT ANY
SOLUTION WOULD RESOLVE WEST BANK AND GOLAN TERRITORIAL
QUESTIONS AND NOT LEAVE SYRIA ALONE. THE U.S. COULD
PROVIDE THESE "GUARANTEES." WHEN I ASKED RIFAI
WHETHER THAT MEANT THE U.S. HAD TO DELIVER BEGIN TO
ASAD IN ADVANCE OF GENEVA ON TERRITORY, HE SAID NO.
IT WOULD BE ENOUGH IF THE U.S. BECAME COMMITTED TO
FULL WITHDRAWAL AND GAVE SOME ASSURANCE IT WAS PRE-
PARED TO CARRY THROUGH. I ASKED IF A COMMITMENT TO
WITHDRAWAL TO 1967 LINES WITH MINOR RECTIFICATIONS
AND NORMALIZATION OR FULL PEACE MEASURES WITH THE
SAME DEGREE OF ASSURANCE WOULD HELP. RIFAI SAID HE
HAD NOT DISCUSSED THIS POINT WITH ASAD, BUT THAT IT
MIGHT. WHEN I PRESSED RIFAI FOR WHAT THE "ASSURANCE"
WAS, HE WAS NOT ABLE TO SAY SPECIFICALLY, ONLY TO
SAY THAT ASAD SEES THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS AS A
ZIG-ZAG, THAT THE ISRAELI LOBBY CAN THEREFORE NEGATE
EVERY POSITIVE PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT AND AS A RESULT
ASAD IS LEFT WITH THE CONCLUSION THAT THE LOBBY WILL
SHOOT DOWN ANY PEACE SETTLEMENT WHICH INCLUDES ISRAELI WITHDRAWALS
FROM THE GOLAN AND THE WEST BANK. AS A RESULT SYRIA RAISES
ISSUES LIKE THE PLO MUST GO IN ORDER TO AVOID BECOMING

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INVOLVED IN COVERING FOR EGYPT.

4. ON THE LATTER POINT, RIFAI NOTED THAT ASAD
ACCEPTS THE NOTION THAT PROCEDURAL ARRANGEMENTS
ON WORKING GROUPS CANNOT PREVENT EGYPT FROM DOING
WHAT IT WISHES, OR SUBSTITUTE FOR A LACK OF ACCORD
BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA ON HOW THINGS ARE TO BE HANDLED.
NEVERTHELESS, ASAD IS CONCERNED ABOUT HIS NEGOTIATIONS
SECRET

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ON GENEVA BECOMING AN EXCUSE FOR EGYPT'S GOING IT
ALONE, AND IN RETURN TOLD RIFAI THAT IF SUCH HAPPENED,
THE SYRIANS WOULD MOVE TO PATCH THINGS UP QUICKLY WITH
IRAQ AND IMPLIED HE HAD THE RESOURCES TO DO SO. RIFAI
ALSO SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THE ARABS WOULD HAVE A
VERY HARD TIME GETTING AGREEMENT ON WHICH PALESTINIANS
MIGHT GO TO GENEVA, BUT THAT IT JUST MIGHT WORK.
HE ALSO TOLD ME THAT HE THOUGHT THAT ASAD WOULD BEND
A BIT MORE ON BILATERAL WORKING GROUPS, BUT WOULD
PROBABLY INSIST ON THE NEED FOR THE PLENARY TO WORK
OUT FIRST THE BASIC PRINCIPLES ON THE THREE MAJOR
ITEMS OF BUSINESS, TERRITORY, PEACE AND PALESTINIAN
RIGHTS. RIFAI EMPHASIZED ASAD'S DISTASTE FOR ARAFAT
AND ASAD'S NEGATIVISM ON ADDING ANOTHER STATE CALLED "PALESTINE"
TO THE ARAB FOLD. ASAD SAID HE WOULD SUPPORT
EVEN SAUDI ARABIA IF IT COULD GET THE WEST BANK
BACK, BUT THERE IS NO NEED FOR A MINI-STATE.

5. WHILE RIFAI HAD NOT BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE KING,
WHO ARRIVED BACK LAST NIGHT, HE HAD HEARD THAT THE
KING'S TALK LAST WEEK WITH ASAD HAD GONE WELL AND
SAID THAT HE HAD HOPES THAT THE KING'S CURRENT ROUND
OF CONTACTS COULD BRING THE ARAB POSITIONS CLOSER.

6. ASAD REPORTEDLY REMAINS UNHAPPY WITH THE U.S.
PRESENTATION TO HIM ON THE "ISRAELI" PAPER BEFORE HE,
ASAD, HAD HAD A CHANCE TO REPLY TO THE ORIGINAL U.S.
PAPER. IN RETURN, RIFAI TOLD ME ASAD DID NOT COMMENT
TO THE PRESIDENT ON THE WP, BUT MERELY REPEATED SYRIA'S
POSITION ON A PEACE SETTLEMENT. RIFAI SAID HE BELIEVES
IT HELPS GREATLY IN BRIDGING COMMUNICATIONS GAPS IF
PRESIDENT CARTER COMMUNICATES DIRECT WITH ASAD BY
LETTER. HE DOES NOT BELIEVE KHADDAM REPORTS WELL AND
SECRET

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GAVE ME SOME EXAMPLES OF DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN WHAT
KHADDAM HAD SAID ABOUT HIS WASHINGTON MEETINGS AND WHAT
HASSAN IBRAHIM HAD SAID FROM HIS REVIEW WITH US OF THE
SAME ISSUES. KHADDAM IS A WISHFUL THINKER, RIFAI SAID,
AND SHALLOW ON NON-INTER-ARAB ISSUES. KHADDAM TOLD

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ZAID THAT SOVIETS WERE COMMITTED NOT TO GO TO GENEVA IF SYRIANS DID NOT. WHEN ZAID TOLD THIS TO ASAD, ASAD SAID THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NO SUCH COMMITMENT. RIFAI ALSO SAID WE SHOULD WATCH ARABIC TRANSLATIONS. THE WP LOOKS BAD TO THE ARABS IN ENGLISH, " BUT YOU SHOULD SEE WHAT AN ARABIC TRANSLATION CAN LOOK LIKE*"

7. I ASKED RIFAI ABOUT WHAT ASAD HAD TO SAY ON HIS INTERNAL AND IRAQI PROBLEMS. RIFAI SUMMARIZED FOR ME. ASAD CLAIMED THAT IRAQ IS DIVIDED BY FACTIONS AND THAT THESE FACTIONS INTERFERE IN SYRIAN INTERNAL AFFAIRS. ASAD SAID HE REFUSED A SYRIAN MILITARY INTELLIGENCE PLAN FOR A RETALIATORY ASSASSINATION EFFORT AGAINST AN IRAQI VICE PRESIDENT VISITING INDIA (IN RETURN FOR ATTEMPT ON KHADDAM IN ABU DHABI). ASAD SAID, "WE DON'T OPERATE THAT WAY." BUT HE DID SAY HE HAS GIVEN GREEN LIGHT TO "FACTIONS" (NOT SAR GOVERNMENT) TO DO WHAT THEY WISH IN IRAQ. RIFAI SAID ASAD BELIEVES THE BAATH PARTY AND THE ARMY ARE THE BEDROCK OF HIS SUPPORT AND ARE STILL LOYAL. NOTHING WAS SAID ABOUT THE ANTI-CORRUPTION DRIVE.

8. RIFAI AND I TALKED AT SOME LENGTH ABOUT IDEAS WHICH ZAID HAD TALKED ABOUT SOME YEARS AGO--A TRANSITIONAL REGIME FOR THE WEST BANK AND SELF-DETERMINATION. WHILE ZAID SAID HE HAD GIVEN THE PROCESS A GREAT DEAL OF THOUGHT, HE CAME UP WITH VERY LITTLE NEW.

9. RIFAI CLAIMED HE WAS STILL CONCERNED THAT THE KING HAD NO REAL POLICY IN MIND EXCEPT TO FIND THE SECRET

HIGHEST COMMON DENOMINATOR OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN SYRIA AND EGYPT ON GOING TO GENEVA. HE DID NOT RAISE WITH ME HIS LONGSTANDING IDEA THAT THE KING SHOULD GO OUT IN FRONT ON NEGOTIATING FOR THE WEST BANK. HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE KING SHOULD GO TO GENEVA WITH EGYPT ALONE, AND SAID THE KING'S CURRENT MOTIVATION IN SHUTTLING AROUND THE ARAB WORLD IS TO AVOID HAVING TO MAKE A TOUGH CHOICE BETWEEN GOING TO GENEVA WITH EGYPT OR STAYING BACK WITH SYRIA. FINALLY, RIFAI SAID THAT ITEM NUMBER ONE ON THE TUNIS ARAB LEAGUE FOREIGN MINISTER'S MEETING AGENDA WILL BE TO REFER THE QUESTION OF AN ARAB SUMMIT TO THE AL SYG WHERE IT WILL BE BATTED AROUND BUT NOT ACTED ON. SADAT AND ASAD DO NOT WANT A FULL SUMMIT. A CON-FRONTATION STATE SUMMIT COULD BE WORKED OUT WITHOUT TOO MUCH DIFFICULTY IF THE KING'S CURRENT MISSION IS REASONABLY SUCCESSFUL AND IF THE SAUDIS COULD BE PERSUADED TO CALL IT TOGETHER.

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10. COMMENT: RIFAI HAS A GOOD MEMORY AND IN THE
PAST HAD TENDED TO REPORT CAREFULLY EXCEPT WHEN ONE
OF HIS PET IDEAS IS INVOLVED. IN THIS CASE I BELIEVE
TWO POINTS ARE WORTH KEEPING IN MIND. THE CONTINUING
ATTACHMENT OF RIFAI TO A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH
SYRIA FOR JORDAN IN THE FUTURE MIGHT TEND TO SOFTEN
SOME OF THE ROUGH EDGES AROUNDASAD AND MELLOW HIM, HIS
POLICIES, AND PROBLEMS A BIT IN RIFAI'S REPORTING. THE IDEA
THAT JORDAN SHOULD RE-EXERT ITSELF
ON THE WEST BANK NEGOTIATIONS HAS ALSO BEEN A RIFAI
FAVORITE. IT WAS SOMEWHAT MUTED IN MY TALK.
RIFAI HAS UNIQUE WCCESS TO ASAD AND WE FIND HIS
REPORTING VALUABLE, BUT WOULD OBVIOUSLY DEFER TO
AMBASSADOR MURPHY FOR FULLYR COMMENT AND AN ASSESSMENT.
SECRET

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11. RECOMMEND DEPT REPEAT TO CAIRO, DAMASCUS AND
TEL AVIV.
PICKERING UNQTE VANCE

SECRET

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